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UNCLAS CHENNAI 000231

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MAYAWATI GIVES HER PARTY'S NATIONAL SECRETARY THE BOOT

REF: CHENNAI 192

¶1. (U) Summary: General Secretary of the Bhujan Samaj Party (BSP) P.G.R. Sindhia was unceremoniously tossed from his office by party president and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati on June 24. Sindhia's defenestration followed the party's dismal performance in recently concluded legislative assembly elections in Karnataka, Sindhia's home state (reftel). According to media reports, Sindhia now hopes to travel to the United States to campaign among Indian-American voters for presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama. Sindhia's position as a non-Dalit leading a largely Dalit party made him a somewhat anomalous figure, but his inability to deliver for the BSP on his home turf made him more of a liability than an asset for Mayawati. End Summary.

Mayawati expels Sindhia from the BSP

¶2. (U) Rajya Sabha member and the BSP's National General Secretary in charge of Karnataka Veer Singh announced on June 24 that he had, under Mayawati's instructions, removed Sindhia from all party posts.

The BSP's press release stated that Sindhia was "not able to work in coordination with old office-bearers of the party." Underlining the secrecy and boldness of the purge, party workers removed overnight all the furniture from the office rented by Sindhia.

¶3. (SBU) Sindhia blamed his removal on reports to Mayawati from her Karnataka observers that he lacked respect for Dalits. Some of our political contacts in Karnataka attribute Sindhia's removal, however, to his demonstrated lack of a political base. A Bangalore-based editor for a major newspaper told us Sindhia's campaigning for the BSP in the May legislative assembly elections was, at best, "fitful." The BSP failed to win a single assembly seat. In fact, the candidate in Sindhia's former district received a mere 2000 votes and therefore lost his deposit paid to secure a place on the ballot by failing to secure at least one-sixth of the votes cast, the ultimate humiliation for a political wannabe.

Hints of cooperation with other parties?

¶4. (SBU) The editor also observed that the removal of Sindhia -- a former Janata Dal Secular (JDS) member -- may facilitate BSP-JDS cooperation in the state. He noted that Sindhia's antipathy towards former Prime Minister and current JDS leader Deve Gowda and his family had precluded this possibility earlier. (Comment: Sindhia departed the JDS formally in December 2007, but was something of a dissident for a while. His dissatisfaction with the JDS arose ostensibly because he was unhappy with his secular party's alliance with the BJP, but possibly because he was not given a state-level ministerial position in the JDS-BJP coalition government that ruled Karnataka until October/November 2007. End Comment.) One of Deve Gowda's sons told us that increased JDS cooperation with Congress and perhaps even the BSP was a possibility, but added quickly that "nothing is decided."

Willing to lend a hand to Obama

¶5. (SBU) Now bereft of a party, Sindhia told a press conference that he plans to use some of his free time to travel to the United States and campaign for Barack Obama. (Note: Sindhia told us in March of his interest in assisting in the Democratic Party's presidential campaign by helping the party reach out to Indian-American voters. End note.) When we spoke with him after the press conference, however, he made clear that he was unsure about the the exact nature of his potential involvement in the Obama campaign.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Sindhia's high-level position in the BSP, as a non-Dalit leading a party of mainly Dalits, was somewhat anomalous, but his failure to deliver even a modicum of success on his home turf in Karnataka made him more of a liability than an asset for Mayawati. The effect on local politics is uncertain, especially since the BSP fared so poorly in the May elections. Sindhia's removal eliminates one obstacle preventing closer JDS-BSP cooperation, but since the JDS is definitely moving closer to the Congress Party in Karnataka, achieving cooperation among all three parties would go against the grain of the national trend of the BSP's increasing opposition to Congress. End Comment.

HOPPER